



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 7 January 1969



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
7 JANUARY 1969

1. Israel-Lebanon

Eshkol has written a letter to Lebanese President Hilu which could be part of an effort to lay the groundwork for further action against Lebanon. The letter asserts that Israel feels threatened by "terrorist gangs" operating out of Lebanon. It concludes in fairly explicit terms that Lebanon can expect more trouble unless the terrorist activities are stopped.

Since the Israelis realize Lebanon cannot control the terrorists, Eshkol's letter could be justification for military action which Tel Aviv has already decided upon.

We have seen no indication that the Israelis are getting ready for a major military effort. They could, of course, mount a moderately large retaliatory raid with no warning.

2. Syria-Egypt

The Syrian foreign minister has turned up in Cairo on a hastily arranged visit. The Egyptians say they will be trying--without much hope, we suspect--to persuade the minister to modify Syria's rigidly uncompromising position on the Arab-Israel dispute.

3. Cuba

More than 100 Cubans attempted a mass escape into the Guantanamo base yesterday--the largest single attempt ever. Eighty-six of them made it.

The number of "fence jumpers" has increased steadily over the years as Cuba's economic situation worsened. There were over 1,000 escapees last year.

4. South Vietnam

One of Ky's aides [redacted] that Ky would definitely be going back to Paris. Although no firm date has been set, the aide doubted Ky would return until after Tet (17 February). The aide noted, however, that Ky's travel plans would change on short notice if there was any significant new development in Paris.

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5. Soviet Union -
Communist China

Moscow's ambassador in Vientiane made a special point on Saturday of lecturing Ambassador Sullivan on the dangers of dealing with Peking. After noting that the US and Chinese ambassadors are scheduled to meet in Warsaw on 20 February, he asserted there are "good possibilities" of reaching a viable settlement in Southeast Asia if the US deals with Hanoi. He said he hoped Washington did not think it could make a better deal by talking to men "without principles" in Peking.

Soviet fear of Sino-American collusion is never far below the surface. It often finds expression in ways such as this when another Warsaw meeting is in the offing.

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6. Australia

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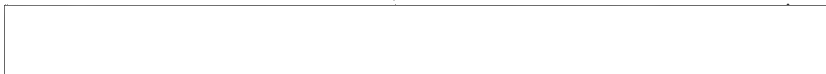
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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of US
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

7 January 1969

I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

More on Reconstruction: Hanoi evidently is preparing its allies for sizable postwar economic aid requests. In a pep talk last month to the foreign press corps (composed almost entirely of Communist correspondents), a North Vietnamese Ministry of Construction official said expenditures on reconstruction are expected to be "enormous," and, while Hanoi hopes to get some aid from non-Communist countries, it will rely on Communist aid for the bulk of reconstruction assistance.

The official said direct aid from the United States is "not being counted on," but he mentioned Japan and France as possible contributors. He indicated that French aid would be especially welcome, doubtless in part because he probably had a French news agency representative in his audience.

Hanoi has attempted to increase economic contacts with both France and Japan during the past year. Trade with both countries has fallen since 1965 and in 1968 totaled approximately \$1.2 million with France and \$7.6 million with Japan. French businessmen have shown little interest in reviving trade, largely because of North Vietnam's lack of enough salable products.

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For the moment, North Vietnam's plans for postwar foreign economic relations are still in the formative stages. Reconstruction planning, however, seems to be moving ahead rapidly, largely on the basis of Communist aid. In large part, these plans may reflect the new aid agreement concluded with the Soviet Union in November.

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Soviet Tug to Vietnam: The Soviet salvage tug Gelios appears to be en route to North Vietnam. The Gelios may be going to replace the salvage tug Argus which has been stationed in Haiphong since October 1967. While the exact duties of the Argus are not known, it has been used as a communications center, and has lent assistance to damaged ships.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL
ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report to-day.

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